

Motor Vehicle Occupant Protection Fact Sheet

Motor vehicle crashes pose a tremendous risk for children. In 2001, motor vehicle occupant injuries were one of the leading causes of injury deaths among school aged children, 5 through 18 years old. Among this population, adolescents 15-18 years had the highest rates of motor vehicle occupant injuries. Seat belts and child restraint use can prevent motor vehicle injuries to children. Safety belts increases the chance of surviving a crash by 45%. (Governor's Highway Safety Bureau) Yet, in 1999, 22% of children 5 and under were observed riding unrestrained in Massachusetts. This same study found 57% of children 6 to 12 were unbelted (Governor's Highway Safety Bureau). M.G.L. c.90, s.24A requires children to ride in a federally approved child safety seat until they are 5 years old and over 40 pounds. For children ages 5 to 12, and who weigh over 40 pounds, a booster seat or safety belt must be used.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY GOALS

- provide age-appropriate instruction in passenger safety at all levels;
- develop school policies that reinforce Massachusetts law;
- serve as positive role models;
- provide educational materials to parents;
- encourage students to buckle up on every ride and remind family and friends to buckle-up also;
- work with local law enforcement and community groups to increase compliance with the law;
- promote referrals to Buckle-Up Hotline within community; and
- encourage the use of booster seats for children 5-8 years old.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Provide occupant protection instruction (utilizing curricula, speakers, videos, hands-on activities); incorporate information into other subject areas. Post signs in parking lots, organize health and safety fairs and poster or writing contests. Local schools have sponsored prom-time simulated car crash events, alcohol-free graduation parties, hosted Convincer demonstrations and organized testimony by elementary school students at public hearings on safety belt legislation.

RESOURCES: Local safety officers@ Governor's Highway Safety Bureau, Emergency Nurses C@A.R.E. (Cancel Alcohol Related Emergencies), Regional Occupant Protection Coordinators, Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), curricula, videos, Massachusetts Child Passenger Safety Law handout, Buckle-Up Hotline handout, stickers.

SPECIAL NOTE: National Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week is in February; the last week of May is Buckle-Up America Week.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Injury Prevention and Control Program, DPH

Phone: 617-624-5413 Fax: 617-624-5075 Website: <http://www.mass.gov/dph/fch/injury/>

Governor's Highway Safety Bureau's Child Passenger Safety Program

Phone: 617-725-3301 Website: <http://www.mass.gov/ghsb>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Website: <http://www.nhtsa.gov>

American Academy of Pediatrics

Website: <http://www.aap.org>